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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 000347

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE (NARDI)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [HR](#) [PGOV](#) [HR](#) [IZ](#) [IZPREL](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: BUCKING UP THE WEAK-KNEED CROATIANS

REF: ZAGREB 338

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR LAWRENCE ROSSIN FOR REASONS 1.5 (B,D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) CROATIA'S INITIAL SUPPORT FOR THE USG POSITION ON
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IRAQ IS WAVERING UNDER PRESSURE FROM EU COUNTRIES AS THE GOC PREPARES TO PRESENT ITS APPLICATION FOR EU MEMBERSHIP. PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST ACTION IN IRAQ WITHOUT NEW UNSC SANCTION IS ALSO A STRONG FACTOR AS PM RACAN TRIES TO KEEP A SHAKY COALITION TOGETHER. ON FEBRUARY 13, ONE DAY AFTER PM RACAN CALLED THE RECENT VILNIUS-10 STATEMENT "OPEN TO INTERPRETATION," THE AMBASSADOR DELIVERED A STRONG MESSAGE TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY: THE REAL ISSUE IS NOT HOW THE EU INTERPRETS CROATIA'S STATEMENTS, BUT HOW THE WORLD REMOVES THE THREAT OF SADDAM HUSSEIN'S WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION. LATER ON FEBRUARY 13 (BUT INDEPENDENT OF THE AMBASSADOR'S MESSAGE), PM RACAN RELEASED A MORE APPROPRIATE STATEMENT (SEE TEXT AT PARA 9 BELOW) CALLING FOR FULL IRAQI COMPLIANCE WITH UNSCR 1441 TOGETHER WITH AN APPEAL FOR A UNIFIED POSITION WITHIN THE EU AND BETWEEN THE EU AND THE USG. IT SEEMS CLEAR TO US THAT THE GOC BELIEVES THAT SOME EUROPEAN COUNTRIES ARE READY TO HOLD CROATIA'S EU APPLICATION HOSTAGE TO GOC BEHAVIOR ON IRAQ. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) ON FEBRUARY 12, PM RACAN TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE FEBRUARY 5 STATEMENT SIGNED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF ALL "VILNIUS 10" COUNTRIES WAS "IMPRECISE ... AND OPEN TO INTERPRETATION" (REFTEL). ABSENT CLEAR LEADERSHIP, THE PUBLIC DEBATE IN CROATIA HAS FOCUSED NOT ON THE THREAT POSED BY SADDAM HUSSEIN'S REGIME AND ITS WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION, BUT ON WHETHER OR NOT FM PICULA SHOULD HAVE SIGNED THE V-10 STATEMENT AND HOW CROATIA'S BID FOR EU MEMBERSHIP WILL BE AFFECTED BY ITS POSITION ON IRAQ.

3. (C) ON FEBRUARY 13, THE AMBASSADOR SOUGHT AN EARLY MEETING WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TO GET THE GOC TO REFOCUS
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ITS ENERGY ON THE MORE IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THIS ISSUE. WITH ASSISTANT FOREIGN MINISTER NOBILO, HE PRESSED FOR THE GOC TO "GET OFF THE FENCE;" PM RACAN'S STATEMENT ON FEBRUARY 12 WAS EQUIVOCAL AND LOOKED LIKE CROATIA WAS BACKING AWAY FROM THE V-10 STATEMENT. WHAT WAS CROATIA'S POLICY, ANYWAY?

4. (C) NOBILO SAID THAT CROATIA IS NOT BACKING AWAY FROM THE V-10 STATEMENT, BUT IS TRYING TO ADDRESS THE PERCEPTION IN THE PUBLIC AND IN POLITICAL CIRCLES THAT THE GOC WAS HURRIED INTO SIGNING THE STATEMENT AND HAD MADE A BINDING COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT MILITARY ACTION. HE APPEALED TO THE AMBASSADOR FOR "PATIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING" AS THE GOC IS IN A DELICATE SITUATION. THE GOC IS IN THE FINAL STAGES OF SUBMITTING ITS APPLICATION FOR EU MEMBERSHIP; THE REACTION OF THE EU COULD HAVE POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS FOR THE CURRENT COALITION GOVERNMENT, WHICH IS ALREADY ON SHAKY GROUND IN AN ELECTION YEAR. NOBILO SAID THAT THE GOC POSITION WOULD BE "CLARIFIED" BY A STATEMENT TO BE RELEASED LATER IN THE DAY FOLLOWING A CABINET MEETING THEN UNDERWAY.

5. (C) THE AMBASSADOR SAID WE WOULD LOOK AT THE STATEMENT CAREFULLY AND WOULD BE BACK IN TOUCH, BUT WARNED THAT THE ABSENCE OF FORTHRIGHT GOC LEADERSHIP ON THE REAL ISSUE AT STAKE -- DISARMING SADDAM -- IS ALLOWING THE PUBLIC DEBATE TO GET OFF TRACK. THE AMBASSADOR SAID HE WAS DISAPPOINTED; THIS IS ONE OF THE TIMES IN HISTORY WHEN NATIONS MUST TAKE A STAND; CROATIA TOOK A STRONG STAND WHEN IT SIGNED UP TO THE V-10 STATEMENT; NOW IT WAS WEAKENING.

6. (C) NOBILO WAS EXPLICIT ABOUT EU PRESSURE, EXPLAINING THAT THE GOC IS UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE FROM "OPPONENTS" OF THE
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U.S. ON IRAQ (HE DID EVERYTHING BUT SAY FRANCE AND GERMANY BY NAME). THE "BIG" EU STATES HAVE WARNED THEM THAT THE "INCOMING COUNTRIES ARE BEING PERCEIVED AS TROUBLEMAKERS" AND SAID THAT CROATIA MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO HURT PROSPECTS FOR ITS APPLICATION FOR EU MEMBERSHIP, WHICH IT PLANS TO SUBMIT

NEXT WEEK. NOBILO SAID THAT THE STATEMENT WOULD NOT WEAKEN THE V-10'S CALL FOR IRAQ TO DISARM, BUT WOULD ALSO MAKE A PLEA FOR UNITY WITHIN THE EU AND A UNIFIED POSITION ON IRAQ THROUGHOUT THE NORTH ATLANTIC COMMUNITY.

17. (C) NOBILO REPEATED HIS PLEA FOR PATIENCE; HE EXPECTS THAT AFTER THE NEXT BLIX REPORT TO THE UNSC, THE EU COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING NEXT WEEK AND CROATIA'S SUBMISSION OF ITS APPLICATION FOR EU MEMBERSHIP, THE GOC WILL BE MORE RESPONSIVE. THE AMBASSADOR WARNED THAT CROATIA NEEDS TO MAKE UP ITS OWN MIND; THE LACK OF EU UNITY WOULD CERTAINLY CONTINUE PAST NEXT MONDAY; THE TIME FOR ACTION WAS SHORT.

18. (C) THE STATEMENT AS RELEASED AFTER THE FEBRUARY 13 CABINET MEETING SEEMS TO REPRESENT ACCURATELY THE CROATIAN GOVERNMENT'S MUDDLED UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS IMPORTANT. IT CALLS FOR FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF UNSCR 1441 AND DECLARES THAT IRAQI BEHAVIOR WILL DETERMINE "WHETHER THIS CRISIS WILL END

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	PERC-00
	DS-00	FBIE-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01
	VCE-00	NEA-00	DCP-01	NSAE-00	OIC-02	IRM-00	SSO-00
	SS-00	EPAE-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-01	NFAT-00	SAS-00
	SWCI-00	/005W					

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O 131645Z FEB 03
FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9460
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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IN PEACE OR WAR." BUT THEN THE STATEMENT DRIFTS OFF INTO CALLS FOR UNITY WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND FOR A UNIFIED APPROACH BETWEEN THE EU AND THE U.S. THE AMBASSADOR IS CONTACTING NOBILO TO URGE THAT THE GOC GET ITS FOCUS BACK ON THE REAL ISSUE AND OFF OF ITS HAND-WRINGING.

19. (U) BEGIN TEXT OF INFORMAL EMBASSY TRANSLATION OF FEBRUARY 13 GOC STATEMENT ON IRAQ:
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GOC POSITION ON IRAQI CRISIS

CROATIA IS AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE ANTI-TERRORIST COALITION AND HAS SINCE ITS CREATION SOUGHT TO CONTRIBUTE TO ITS EFFECTIVENESS ACCORDING TO ITS OWN ABILITIES, ESPECIALLY WITHIN OUR REGION. THROUGHOUT THE YEARS CROATIAN DIPLOMACY HAS CONSISTENTLY AND ACTIVELY WORKED ON BANNING, CONTROLLING AND DESTROYING WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION.

ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS CROATIA HAS CLEARLY CALLED ON IRAQ TO COOPERATE FULLY AND UNCONDITIONALLY WITH UN INSPECTORS AND TO COMPLY WITH ALL REQUIREMENTS FROM UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS, ESPECIALLY THOSE PERTAINING TO THE IDENTIFICATION AND DESTRUCTION OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION. CROATIA HAS ITS INSPECTORS IN THE UN TEAM AND HAS IN THAT MANNER AND OTHERWISE SOUGHT TO CONTRIBUTE TO PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF THIS CRISIS.

CONSISTENT WITH THAT POLICY AND BASED ON ITS FULL SUPPORT TO UNSC RESOLUTION 1441, CROATIA HAS JOINED IN A NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES FOR A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF THE IRAQI CRISIS. THE STATEMENT SIGNED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF THE VILNIUS GROUP COUNTRIES CONSTITUTES A FORM OF ADDITIONAL PRESSURE ON IRAQ TO COMPLY WITH UNSC RESOLUTIONS REGARDING COOPERATION WITH UN INSPECTORS AND DESTRUCTION OF THE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION, WHICH WAS CROATIA'S PRIMARY MOTIVE WHEN JOINING THE STATEMENT IN SOLIDARITY.

AS A NATO CANDIDATE AND A COUNTRY SCHEDULED TO APPLY FOR EU MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMING DAYS, CROATIA IS PARTICULARLY
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INTERESTED IN SEEING THE STRENGTHENING OF JOINT EU POLICIES ON FOREIGN AND SECURITY MATTERS. THAT IS WHY CROATIA JOINED THE FEBRUARY 4 EU PRESIDENCY DEMARCHE ON IRAQ. CROATIA THEREFORE HOPES THAT THE UPCOMING EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF

THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL WILL RESULT IN A MUCH-NEEDED CONSENSUS ON WAYS TO RESOLVE THE IRAQI CRISIS. WE ARE EQUALLY INTERESTED IN THE PRESERVATION AND SOLIDIFICATION OF THE POLITICAL UNITY AND TOGETHERNESS OF THE EURO-ATLANTIC REGION. STABLE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE E.U. AND THE U.S. - I.E. WITHIN THE EURO-ATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP - IS THE BEST GUARANTEE OF PEACE AND STABILITY FOR THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER, BUT ALSO FOR EFFECTIVE STRUGGLE AGAINST TERRORISM. EURO-ATLANTIC DIALOGUE IS ALSO NEEDED IN ORDER TO EXAMINE AND CONTROL ALL POSSIBLE ASPECTS OF RESOLVING THE IRAQI CRISIS.

CITIZENS OF CROATIA HIGHLY VALUE PEACE AND PEACEFUL POLITICAL MEANS FOR RESOLVING PROBLEMS, BECAUSE THEY KNOW VERY WELL ABOUT THE HORRORS OF WAR AND DESTRUCTION. THAT'S WHY CROATIA IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN RESOLVING THE CRISIS WITHOUT WAR. STANDING ON ITS PRINCIPLES OF PLEADING FOR WAR AND STABILITY IN THE WORLD, AS WELL AS FOR THE UNDISPUTABLE ROLE OF THE U.N., CROATIA CONTINUES TO BELIEVE THAT NOT ALL MEANS FOR PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF THE IRAQI CRISIS HAVE BEEN EXHAUSTED. THE GOVERNMENT OF CROATIA WARNS THAT IT DEPENDS ON IRAQI BEHAVIOR WHETHER THIS CRISIS WILL END IN PEACE OR WAR. THAT IS WHY WE ARE ONCE AGAIN CALLING ON IRAQ TO FULLY AND IMMEDIATELY COMPLY WITH U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1441. AT THE SAME TIME, WE EXPRESS BELIEF THAT EVERY POSSIBLE MEANS OF RESOLVING THIS CRISIS MUST BE ASSESSED WITH REGARD TO WHETHER IT EXPANDS OR NARROWS THE GROUNDS OF TERRORISM. TAKING ALL THIS INTO CONSIDERATION, THE
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GOVERNMENT OF CROATIA APPEALS TO THE U.S., EU MEMBER COUNTRIES, AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE ANTI-TERRORIST COALITION TO REACH WITHIN THE U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL THE MUCH- NEEDED CONSENSUS AND UNITY IN FUTURE ACTIVITIES ON RESOLVING THE IRAQI CRISIS.

END TEXT.
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